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LETTER
OF
THOMAS PAINE,
TO
THE PEOPLE
OF
FRANCE.

Published and Distributed Gratis

BY THE

London Corresponding Society.

LONDON

1792

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LETTER

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THOMAS TAYLOR

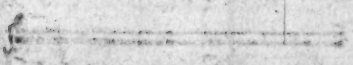
THE PEOPLE

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LONDON

1793

P A R I S,

SEPTEMBER 25.

(First Year of the Republic.)

FELLOW CITIZENS,

“ I RECEIVE, with affectionate gratitude, the honour which the late National Assembly has conferred upon me, by adopting me a Citizen of France; and the additional honour of being elected by my Fellow-Citizens a Member of the National Convention. Happily impressed, as I am, by those testimonies of respect shewn towards me as an individual, I feel my felicity encreased by seeing the barrier broken down that divided Patriotism by spots of earth, and limited Citizenship to the soil, like vegetation.

“ Had those honours been conferred in an hour of national tranquillity, they would have afforded no other means of shewing my affection, than to have accepted and enjoyed them; but they come accompanied with circumstances that give me the honourable opportunity of commencing my Citizenship in the stormy hour of difficulties. I come not to

enjoy repose. Convinced that the cause of France is the cause of all mankind, and that as liberty cannot be purchased by a wish, I gladly share with you the dangers and honours necessary to success.

“ I am well aware that the moment of any great change, such as that accomplished on the 10th of August, is unavoidably the moment of terror and confusion. The mind, highly agitated by hope, suspicion, and apprehension, continues without rest till the change be accomplished. But let us now look calm and confidentially forward, and success is certain. It is no longer the paltry cause of Kings, or of this, or of that individual, that calls France and her armies into action. It is the great cause of ALL. It is the establishment of a new æra, that shall blot Despotism from the earth, and fix, on the lasting principles of Peace and Citizenship, the great Republic of Man.

“ It has been my fate to have borne a share in the commencement and complete establishment of one Revolution (I mean the Revolution of America). The success and events of that Revolution are encouraging to us. The prosperity and happiness that have since flowed
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to that country, have amply rewarded her for all the hardships she endured, and for all the dangers she encountered.

“ The principles on which that Revolution began, have extended themselves to Europe; and an over-ruling Providence is regenerating the Old World by the principles of the New. The distance of America from all the other parts of the globe, did not admit of her carrying those principles beyond her own situation. It is to the peculiar honour of France, that she now raises the standard of Liberty for all nations; and in fighting her own battles, contends for the rights of all mankind.

“ The same spirit of fortitude that insured success to America, will insure it to France; for it is impossible to conquer a nation determined to be free! The military circumstances that now unite themselves to France, are such as the Despots of the earth know nothing of, and can form no calculation upon. They know not what it is to fight against a nation. They have only been accustomed to make war upon each other, and they know from system and practice, how to calculate the probable success of despot against despot; and
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here their knowledge and their experience end.

“ But in a contest like the present, a new and boundless variety of circumstances arises, that deranges all such customary calculations. When a whole nation acts as an army, the despot knows not the extent of the power against which he contends. New armies rise against him with the necessity of the moment. It is then that the difficulties of an invading enemy multiply, as in the former case they diminished; and he finds them at their height when he expected them to end.

“ The only war that has any similarity of circumstances with the present, is the late Revolution-war in America. On her part, as it now is in France, it was a war of the whole nation.---There it was that the enemy, by beginning to conquer, put himself in a condition of being conquered. His first victories prepared him for defeat. He advanced till he could not retreat, and found himself in the midst of a nation of armies.

“ Were it now to be proposed to the Austrians and Prussians to escort them into the middle of France, and there leave them to make the most of such a situation, they would
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see too much into the dangers of it to accept the offer, and the same dangers would attend them could they arrive there by any other means. Where then is the military policy of their attempting to obtain by force, that which they would refuse by choice. But to reason with despots is throwing reason away. The best of arguments is a vigorous preparation.

“ Man is ever a stranger to the ways by which Providence regulates the order of things. The interference of foreign Despots may serve to introduce into their own enslaved countries the principles they come to oppose. Liberty and Equality are blessings too great to be the inheritance of France alone. It is honour to her to be their first champion; and she may now say to her enemies, with a mighty voice, “ O! ye Austrians, ye Prussians! ye who now turn your bayonets against us; it is for all Europe; it is for all mankind, and not for France alone, that she raises the standard of Liberty and Equality!”

“ The public cause has hitherto suffered from the contradictions contained in the Constitution of the former Constituent Assembly. Those contradictions have served to divide the opinions of individuals at home, and to obscure the
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the great principles of the Revolution in other countries. But when those contradictions shall be removed, and the Constitution be made conformable to the Declaration of Rights; when the bagatelles of monarchy, royalty, regency, and hereditary succession, shall be exposed, with all their absurdities, a new ray of light will be thrown over the world, and the Revolution will derive new strength by being universally understood.

“ The scene that now opens itself to France extends far beyond the boundaries of her own dominions. Every Nation is becoming her colleague, and every Court is become her enemy. It is now the cause of all nations against the cause of all Courts. The terror that despotism felt, clandestinely begot a confederation of Despots; and their attack upon France was produced by their fears at home.

“ In entering on this great scene, greater than any nation has yet been called to act in, let us say to the agitated mind, be calm. Let us punish by instructing, rather than by revenge. Let us begin the new æra by a greatness of friendship, and hail the approach of union and success.

“ Your Fellow Citizen,

“ THOMAS PAINE.”